

## **PART 5 - POLITICAL CONVENTIONS**

### **CONVENTIONS FOR CITY MAYOR / COUNCILLORS / OFFICER RELATIONSHIPS**

Note: Where the term 'Member' is used it will apply to Councillors and the City Mayor

The Council is democratically accountable and those elected to it may have political affiliations. Officers must serve the whole Council objectively. Together they must balance a complex range of obligations and competing interests. For this to be effective, the City Mayor, Councillors and Officers must have mutual trust and respect for each other's requirements and duties. There must also be transparency and consistency in everyday working relationships. These conventions seek to help ensure this.

The Council has a Code of Conduct under the Localism Act 2011 (attached) which sets out the minimum standards Members and co-opted members must observe in the interests of fair treatment and good governance. These Conventions operate within that framework. A failure to adhere to these Conventions may entail a breach of one or more of the principles that underpin the Code of Conduct for members (or indeed the separate Code of Conduct for Officers) but will not necessarily do so in every instance.

The Code and these Conventions cover Members whenever they are "*acting on the business of the Authority*". Further details are given in the Council's Code of Conduct. However, "acting on the business of the Authority" does not preclude a Member from engaging in legitimate scrutiny or challenge to the Council's policies or decision-making in individual cases. Further details are contained in the relevant sections which follow.

Officers of the Council must serve the whole Council objectively and will not seek to give an improper advantage to a Member. Neither will officers seek to exploit their unique access to Members to secure for themselves any improper advantage or bypassing of normal processes/procedures.

Officer advice and support recognises that the City Mayor / Councillors may legitimately act from political perspectives. A party group is entitled to the confidentiality of Officer advice on developing policies. The overall arrangements for Officer advice must be transparent.

The Conventions also seek to reflect the 7 principles of conduct in public life as defined by the Committee on Standards in Public Life (<http://www.public-standards.gov.uk/17-january-2013/>). These have been defined as:

<i>Selflessness</i>	Holders of public office should act solely in terms of the public interest.
<i>Integrity</i>	Holders of public office must avoid placing themselves under any obligation to people or organisations that might try inappropriately to influence them in their

	work. They should not act or take decisions in order to gain financial or other material benefits for themselves, their family, or their friends. They must declare and resolve any interests and relationships.
<i>Objectivity</i>	Holders of public office must act and take decisions impartially, fairly and on merit, using the best evidence and without discrimination or bias.
<i>Accountability</i>	Holders of public office are accountable to the public for their decisions and actions and must submit themselves to the scrutiny necessary to ensure this.
<i>Openness</i>	Holders of public office should act and take decisions in an open and transparent manner. Information should not be withheld from the public unless there are clear and lawful reasons for so doing.
<i>Honesty</i>	Holders of public office should be truthful.
<i>Leadership</i>	Holders of public office should exhibit these principles in their own behaviour. They should actively promote and robustly support the principles and be willing to challenge poor behaviour wherever it occurs.

The document aims to help officers and Members identify clear principles and assist in their application on a daily basis. Therefore Part A defines the principles around key themes with Part B giving more information to help guide their practical application.

It is hoped that this document will prove helpful but where problems arise:

**Members** - should raise unresolved problems with the relevant Divisional Director. If necessary the Group Whip (if applicable) or Monitoring Officer should be consulted.

**Officers** - should raise any unresolved problem with their Divisional Director who will advise or take the matter up with the City Mayor / Councillor as relevant. If necessary, the Monitoring Officer should be consulted. The Monitoring Officer may involve the relevant Group Whip (if applicable).

## **Political Conventions – Part A**

This Part seeks to identify principles with further information to support their application given in Part B where necessary.

The document is therefore divided on the same basis as Part B with section numbers relating to sections in Part B.

### **NEUTRALITY**

1. All Officer appointment and employment decisions must be made on merit alone.
2. Officers serve the whole Council and all officers must be politically neutral at work. Officers should not only be neutral they should appear neutral.
3. Members should respect an Officers' right to private political opinions.
4. The posts of certain senior officers will in law be classed as 'politically restricted'. Those officers will adhere to the restrictions set out in law.
5. Where Members are given policy support it must (i) conform to the "*unified advice*" principle (see explanation in Part B), (ii) be for Council and (iii) not be for party political purposes. Work which could be open to misinterpretation must be transparent and justified where necessary, particularly at sensitive times (such as a pending election).
6. Where close personal relationships arise or exist between Members and Officers these should be declared to the relevant Group Whip (where applicable) and to the Relevant Divisional Director / Monitoring Officer and entered in the voluntary register of interests.
7. The Relevant Divisional Director / Group Whip should consider how to manage or avoid contact to dispel any perceived bias.
8. Mutual Courtesy and due respect between Members and Officers is expected by the Council.
9. Unless operating within the scheme of delegation an individual Member cannot take a "decision" or instruct an Officer to take action.
10. A Members right of access to Council premises and to bring in guests is based on the "*need to know*" (that is, to perform the Member's role).
11. Officers will not seek to give an improper advantage to a Member or seek to exploit their unique access to Members to secure for themselves any improper advantage or bypassing of normal processes/procedures.

## **BRIEFINGS**

- 12** All Members have a right to request information reasonably required to perform his or her role (the “*need to know*”). Officers should assume the Member has a need to know unless a restriction applies.
- 13** Where a Member requests information they should declare any relevant interests they have which are affected by the topic of the proposed Briefing
- 14** Members must respect the confidentiality of information identified as confidential and use only for the purpose it is given.
- 15** Briefings to Party Groups / ‘non-grouped’ Members may be given as part of preparation for the decision making process.
- 16** Non-grouped Members will receive details of any briefings given to Party Groups.

## **MEMBER INVOLVEMENT IN CASEWORK ISSUES**

- 17** A Member’s entitlement to be involved in issues around casework is based on the “*need to know*” and determined in accordance with these Conventions. The “need to know” is not confined to activities designed to “support” policies or decisions, and can legitimately extend to “scrutiny” and/or “challenge”.
- 18** Where lobbied on an issue (especially planning policy) Members should carefully consider whether to express any view at all but if they do choose to comment to explain that any views expressed are personal and they cannot commit or anticipate the Council’s decision. In this context “lobbying” involves more than merely receiving representations/requests to pursue a given outcome, and envisages that the Member has engaged with the lobbyist and formed a commitment to pursuing the desired outcome. Where a Member, who is in the position of being a decision-maker, has been lobbied they should make, a declaration of interest and/or a declaration of bias and decide whether to participate as a decision-maker at all. In other cases (i.e. where the Member is not a decision-maker) a declaration of interests may not be necessary.

Caution should be exercised in all cases where a Member is lobbied to change (as opposed to ‘challenge’ or ‘test’) officer decision-making. Officers apply policies of the Council, and Members may find themselves in positions of conflict with Council policy if they set-out to unduly influence officer decision-making. Proper channels exist to engage with officers about decision-making, and these should be pursued.

- 19** A Member should not act as an individual’s ‘*friend*’, but may act as a ‘*representative*’ for a constituent

## **THE EXECUTIVE**

- 20** All decisions made will be subject to the relevant statutory provisions and rules defined in the Constitution and these Conventions.
- 21** Executive Members, individually or collectively, may determine the timetable for developing their policies subject to requirements for formal reporting, proper scrutiny and meaningful officer advice.
- 22** Withdrawing or deferring an Executive report is an Executive decision and responsibility.

## **SCRUTINY**

In this section the term Committee will also apply to Scrutiny Commissions

- 23** The Scrutiny and the Executive functions acknowledge their different roles and the need for actions to concentrate constructively on bringing benefit to the citizens and stakeholders of the City.
- 24** All finalised scrutiny reports will be formally responded to by the Executive.
- 25** Recommendations to officers and the Executive must be agreed by the Committee.
- 26** There is an expectation that the relevant Executive Member and Relevant Divisional Director will attend the Committee meeting as an invitee with a view to explaining matters relevant to the agenda.
- 27** The procedures of Committee will be defined by the Scrutiny procedure Rules. The operation of the support to scrutiny will be informed by the Scrutiny Operating Protocols which have been confirmed by the Overview Select Committee.
- 28** It is for a full Scrutiny Committee to determine a purposeful work programme for scrutinising the implementation of decisions. Appropriate consultation with relevant parties should be undertaken in doing so.
- 29** Where the Executive and a Scrutiny Committee are considering the same service area, the City Mayor or Assistant City Mayor, Scrutiny Chairs and Vice-Chairs and Relevant Divisional Director should agree an appropriate approach to handling this in a way which is constructive and manageable within the resources and the time line available. This might include undertaking a joint programme of work, and the order in which reports should be consulted upon and presented.
- 30** Any press releases will be issued in accordance with the Conventions covering 'Media Relations and Published Material' set out in this document.

## **REGULATORY, COUNCIL, AND COUNCIL COMMITTEES (PLANNING DEVELOPMENT CONTROL, LICENSING, EMPLOYEES, AUDIT & RISK AND STANDARDS)**

- 31** Development control, licensing (regulatory) and other quasi-judicial matters must be dealt with solely in accordance with the relevant policies and legal requirements.
- 32** The appearance of decisions being based on party political considerations must be avoided. If Officer recommendations are not accepted, care should be taken to ensure that valid reasons are given and that any departures can be justified and that they are consistent over time.
- 33** Only Members who have received appropriate training may participate in decisions relating to regulatory decisions and Employees' Committee Appeal Hearings.

## **MEDIA RELATIONS AND PUBLISHED MATERIAL**

- 34** Statements and published material on behalf of the Council (including the Council's website) must not be party political and must comply with the statutory 'Code of Recommended Practice on Local Authority Publicity' issued by Government.
- 35** Where a press release addresses a matter of political controversy it should seek to present the different positions in relation to the issue in question in a fair manner.
- 36** News releases on behalf of the Council may only be issued through the Communications and Digital Media Team.

## **ELECTION PERIODS**

- 37** From the notice of a Parliamentary or local election until election day: Nothing should be published (including the Council's website) on a politically controversial issue, or which identifies views or policies with those of individual Members or party Groups; Any publicity should be strictly objective, concentrating on facts or explanations.
- 38** During such election periods the Town Hall and City Hall shall not be used for political meetings (other than normal private meetings on Council business). This prohibition shall extend to the Town Hall Square Concourse.

## **Political Conventions – Part B**

This part provides supporting information where necessary to the principles defined in Part A to help their practical application.

The document is therefore divided on the same basis as Part A with the section numbers corresponding to the numbered principles.

### **NEUTRALITY**

- 1** Members have a formal role in certain employment appeals as defined in Council policy.

In terms of appointments the law defines that Members can only be involved in the appointment of certain posts. The City Council has defined that these should be for: Directors and other officers who are directly accountable to a Strategic Director / Head of Paid Service for all or most of their duties (excluding officers whose duties are solely secretarial / clerical / support).

A Member may provide a reference in relation to staffing matters within the Council.

In any officer employment process party political factors cannot be taken into account.

Officers involved in employment decisions must uphold employment procedures and Employee Codes of Conduct and not be influenced by Members other than for posts where Members have a legitimate role in those decisions. Failure to do so could be a disciplinary matter.

- 2** If any questions about neutrality or improper conduct by an officer arise these should be raised in private with the relevant Divisional Director, or the Monitoring Officer.

Public accusation (direct or indirect) of improper conduct is potentially defamatory and such questions should not be raised in public meetings. Advice should be taken before meetings. If an issue arises in a meeting, an adjournment may be appropriate to consider how to deal with it. Challenging a deliberate decision not to declare an interest should not be done in a meeting

Officers must be prepared to correct an inadvertent failure to declare an interest, or to justify a decision not to declare an apparent interest. Prior employment is not automatically a declarable interest, but it may be in certain cases.

- 3** Members' knowledge of an officers private political opinions should not be used against an officer who remains neutral at work and observes the

relevant Codes.

- 4 The Council's Human Resources Team will keep a register of those officer posts classed as politically restricted.

Politically restricted Officers cannot be Members or MPs. They cannot *"speak or publish written work to the public at large or a section of the public, with the apparent intention of affecting public support for a political party"*. They can speak or publish *"to such an extent as is necessary for the proper performance of their duties"*.

- 5 'Unified Advice' is advice which is objective, consistent and points out all relevant factors. Different points of view between officers should be resolved or presented in a balanced way which helps Members to choose between them.

- 6 The test of whether to declare such a relationship is whether a member of  
& the public might reasonably consider the relationship likely to influence the  
7 Member or Officer in their respective roles.

The Member concerned should judge when a personal relationship has formed or whether a family relationship or friendship might reasonably be considered as having influence (depending on domestic arrangements and other circumstances). It should be noted that an Other Disclosable Interest (ODI) might arise in such circumstances.

Where a member of a political group, the Group should consider how working contact between the Member and Officer should be avoided or managed to dispel perceived bias, taking advice from the Monitoring Officer if necessary.

The Officer concerned should judge when to make a declaration. The Relevant Divisional Director should consider how to avoid or manage working contact to dispel perceived bias, taking advice from the Monitoring Officer if necessary. Officers should declare any interests to their manager and where appropriate record using 'MyView'.

- 8 This Convention is not intended to restrict constructive discussion or criticism and the Member's duty to challenge but instead to acknowledge that on many occasions the officer will not be able to respond on equal terms, such as in Council meetings. However bullying by a Member could potentially expose the Council to a claim of constructive dismissal.

Where an officer has concerns that actions may have breached this principle these should be raised with the Monitoring Officer.

Officers should avoid unwarranted criticism of Members and should respect their rights under these Conventions.

- 9 The City Mayor's Scheme of Delegation is available at:



- 10** A Member's right of access is subject to:
- Operational continuity;
  - Confidentiality;
  - Compliance with Health & Safety arrangements;
  - Compliance with physical and information security requirements.
- 11** Staff may raise issues with Members as citizens. They must not lobby Members on personal employment or budgetary matters. Directors should ensure their staff are aware of these requirements and the proper channels for their views to be put forward.

Members should avoid involvement in staff lobbying outside formal procedures and avoid involvement in individual staffing matters. Members should not allow themselves to be lobbied by staff in relation to personal employment or budgetary matters.

## **BRIEFINGS**

- 12**  
**– 14** A Member's right of access is restricted where:
- The information is primarily needed for a non-Council purpose; or
  - There is a conflict of interest; or
  - Where a report is exempt or confidential by law
  - There is an over-riding individual right of confidentiality (for example, in a children's safeguarding or employment matter); or
  - The resources needed to supply the information would be unreasonable.

Executive Members, individually and collectively are entitled to regular confidential briefing on matters relevant to their portfolios and in support of the policies they are developing prior to them formulating formal proposals. The relevant Executive Member or the Executive collectively determines whether confidential briefing material may be released to others for consultation or otherwise. When formal proposals are made supporting Officer advice becomes publishable in conjunction with the proposals.

Other specific roles where members will have a special need to know arising from that role include:

- Chair and Vice-Chair: matters relating to their terms of reference and committee business;
- Scrutiny Committee or Commission members: matters directly relating to a review currently in process
- Ward Member: matters with special implications for the Ward (ie significantly more than the general implications for the City).

A Scrutiny Chair or Vice-Chair is not normally entitled to information in that capacity without it being known to and available to the other.

An Officer should seek clearance from his or her manager before embarking on a significant amount of work to provide information. The officer should be clear about the capacity in which the Member is being briefed and the implications of any interest. In cases of doubt, the Monitoring Officer may be consulted. The Officer should always make it clear if a briefing is not based on unified advice, (ie is still subject to consultation with other Officers). Otherwise the Member is entitled to assume unified advice is being given. Officers should note that any briefings may be disclosable.

Partial or restricted briefings may be given to Members where necessary in the interests of data protection or other considerations.

If officers refuse a request the Member should approach the Relevant Divisional Director and If still dissatisfied the Monitoring Officer may be asked to determine entitlement.

It should also be noted that any unauthorised release of confidential information may damage the Council's reputation or entail a breach of the law.

**15** For all formal briefings to groups and non-grouped Members the following conditions must be applied:

- The Chief Operating Officer knows of and approves the briefing;
- All Groups are informed and offered the same briefing;
- More than one Officer attends;
- Officers withdraw after briefing and any questions, and before political discussion;
- Officers do not write reports for Groups, leaving it for City Mayor / Councillors to present draft Committee reports or briefing notes.

**16** Where a briefing is provided to a Group, 'non-grouped' Members will be offered a written summary, and where appropriate a verbal briefing may be offered. If offered a written summary the non-grouped Member may request that they receive a verbal briefing instead and if necessary refer the request to the Monitoring Officer.

## **MEMBER INVOLVEMENT IN CASEWORK**

**17 & 18** A Members role in relation to casework is:

- To be briefed or consulted where there is a need to know;
- To pursue the interests of individuals by seeking information, testing action taken and asking for the appropriateness of decisions to be reconsidered.

- The Member should avoid becoming unduly involved in individual cases and operational detail, except within clear procedures.

Involvement in legal proceedings and audit investigations carries special dangers of prejudicing the case, and of personal embarrassment. The District Auditor has warned of the dangers of individual Members intervening in the processes of the Council without full knowledge of the facts. Access to files may need to be denied or restricted if one of the restrictions detailed above applies. Any access then allowed may need to be “*managed access*”.

Officers should take the lead in pointing out where the boundaries lie in particular areas, recognising that:

- Members legitimately adopt different approaches to case resolution
- The special local knowledge of particular Members may be useful to a particular case.

Officers should point out to the Member when a restriction on the ‘need to know’ may apply, explore entitlement with the Member and, in cases of doubt, consult the Monitoring Officer.

Directors should ensure that their staff know how to obtain appropriate senior management support (particularly out of hours) when the extent of a Members involvement in an issue needs to be clarified.

Officers should not seek to involve Members in operational detail.

- 19** A Member pursuing a Ward matter on behalf of a close family member or friend should declare the relationship and consider whether to ask another Member to pursue the matter.

## **THE EXECUTIVE**

- 20** Each report to the Executive should be in the name of the City Mayor or a Relevant Divisional Director and be the subject of appropriate officer advice.

Reports to the Executive should ensure that:

- It is made clear what stage in the process has been reached and what is required from the Executive;
- There is a clear recommendation or options presented in a way which enable the Executive to choose between them;
- It is clear who is responsible for action and to what timetable (including further reports);
- All relevant factors are included and the issues are presented with professional objectivity;
- Associated briefings and presentations are also professionally objective

The Monitoring Officer will ensure that all decisions meet criteria laid down in the Constitution or legislation.

Meaningful officer engagement particularly on equalities and financial and legal implications, on which consultees should be named is required. Officers must take account of relevant policies of the Council. Any risks and the reasons for taking must be made clear in the report.

Reports must follow the prescribed template and follow advice given by the relevant Divisional Director and clarify the options considered and the reasons for a recommendation / decision.

- 21** In determining the timetable for developing their policies the Executive or relevant Executive Member will consider:
- The point at which confidential ideas become formal proposals for publication;
  - Whom to consult and to what deadline;
  - The timing of Executive reports.

The relevant Director must ensure that all essential decisions are requested by necessary deadlines.

- 22** A Director will be consulted and may advise on deferring or withdrawing a report. Officers will also provide appropriate professional advice on the issue of the timing of Executive reports / proposals.

## **SCRUTINY**

*In considering actions account will be taken of the Scrutiny Operating Protocols confirmed by Overview Select Committee on 27/09/12.*

In this section the term Committee will also apply to Scrutiny Commissions.

- 23** It is acknowledged that scrutiny may legitimately include both commenting on Executive reports and undertaking formal reviews and producing reports.

Scrutiny should be a constructive process involving appropriate consultation and engagement with relevant stakeholders and avoiding actions that risk prejudging outcomes, or which risk impacting on services prior to any formal recommendations being made.

There should be constructive engagement between the Scrutiny Committee Chair and relevant lead Director(s) during the scoping of any scrutiny review. Officers will seek to facilitate appropriate engagement and dialogue between Scrutiny and the Executive, and other relevant stakeholders.

Officers should also be asked to ensure the factual accuracy of any scoping document or draft report before they are formally issued by a scrutiny committee/commission.

- 24** A scrutiny review report will be considered to be finalised once it has been endorsed by the Overview Select Committee for submission to the Executive. Such endorsement will only be withheld in exceptional circumstances.

In exceptional circumstances, including urgency, the Committee Chair may agree to the review report being sent direct to the Executive and the decision reported to the next meeting of the Overview Select Committee with the review report placed on the agenda for endorsement

Finalised Scrutiny review reports will be submitted to the relevant Executive Member and the City Mayor (and any relevant key stakeholders) as soon as practicable after the meeting of the Overview Select Committee where the report was agreed, together with a letter requesting a formal written response to the findings and recommendations of the review within a maximum of 2 months of the date of the letter

It is accepted that where the Executive's response requires input from outside bodies or stakeholders, then the 2 month deadline may not be practical. In such circumstances the relevant Assistant Mayor will keep the Overview Select Committee and relevant Commission Chairs informed of the progress being made and the response will be delivered as soon as possible.

Written responses received from the Executive / stakeholder(s) will be reported to the Overview Select Committee. Details of responses will be used as part of performance data to illustrate the effectiveness of scrutiny to City residents and stakeholders.

A Scrutiny Committee may ask for more time, information or other views before responding to Executive consultation. A scrutiny request for more time to consider an Executive consultation shall be subject to the City Mayor or Assistant City Mayor agreeing to additional time and consultation (these being matters for the Executive); and the relevant Director agrees that further information can be provided at reasonable cost and use of Officer time and does not place the Council at significant risk for example of legal challenge.

- 25 & 26** By attendance at formal Scrutiny meetings the appropriate Executive Member will be fully aware of the progress of a review and will seek to facilitate full officer support for the process. A Member who has been consulted on an officer decision is accountable to the Scrutiny Committee for the views expressed.

The Chair of the Scrutiny Committee / Commission should ensure that questions are properly directed to the City Mayor or relevant Deputy or

Assistant City Mayor (for example, justifying policy) or Relevant Divisional Director (for example, progress with implementation), inviting both to attend where necessary.

- 27** Each Scrutiny Committee/ Commission has a Lead Officer responsible for coordinating its overall programme and individual agendas in consultation with:
- The Chair and Vice-chair;
  - Relevant Executive Members (in relation to Executive policies in development);
  - Relevant Divisional Directors.

Chairs of Scrutiny Commissions may hold agenda planning meetings approximately two weeks before full scrutiny commission meetings, at which draft agendas and reports should be presented by an appropriate officer wherever possible, who may be the lead officer for the Commission.

The Chair is expected to conduct Scrutiny Committee / Commission meetings so as to ensure:

- The basis of any participation by non-Members of the Committee / Commission is made clear at the outset (for example, question and supplementary, statement, or participation in debate);
- The questioning of Executive Members, Officers and others is properly structured, and conducted in a courteous, seemly and constructive manner.

The involvement of the Executive Member should reflect their status as an invitee and does not restrict the right of the Committee to invite officers to give evidence.

The Chair and Vice-chair should be jointly briefed on questions from the public. After the Chair has responded, the Vice-chair may add comments.

- 28  
&  
29** Where it appears that conflict between Executive and Scrutiny priorities may arise the Relevant Divisional Director will refer the matter to the City Mayor or Assistant City Mayor and relevant Scrutiny Chair and Vice-Chair for consideration.

The work programme of a Scrutiny Committee is devised collaboratively between the Chair, Vice Chair and the relevant lead Director. If the Committee insists on work or evidence that the Director feels is not appropriate / cannot not be prioritised the Monitoring Officer should be consulted on how to resolve the impasse.

The Director will keep the Executive Member informed as appropriate

- 30** The Communications and Digital Media Team will be guided in Scrutiny matters by the Scrutiny Chair, acting in consultation with the Vice-chair (account will also be taken of the Scrutiny protocol in relation to press releases).

See 36 below for more detail.

### **REGULATORY AND COUNCIL COMMITTEES (PLANNING DEVELOPMENT CONTROL, LICENSING, EMPLOYEES, AUDIT & RISK AND STANDARDS)**

- 31** The processes defined in the 'Planning Code Of Good Practice For Member Involvement In Development Control Decisions 2012' must be followed by Members and the Planning and Development Control Committee.
- 32** In order to ensure clarity of what is a Member's role at the meeting where a regulatory committee is held in public committee members should clearly introduce themselves to the public.
- Particular care should be taken to declare interests in formal meetings, at site visits and in formal discussion and, if necessary avoid participation. Potential interests should be raised with Officers before meetings. Any Executive Member would have an interest in a planning application by the Council.
- 33** Any untrained Member asked to participate in a decision should request training, which will be fast-tracked if necessary and where practical to do so.

### **MEDIA RELATIONS AND PUBLISHED MATERIAL**

- 34** Members, through the Executive, are the Council's principal  
**&** spokespersons on policy. As individuals, they may make party political  
**35** comment, but the Council may not publish such comment. Officers may publish factual, professional and technical comment. Reports, presentations and publications must be professionally objective in language, content and tone. Relevant Divisional Directors must ensure that Officers who publish statements and material are competent for the role and understand the requirements of these Conventions.
- 36** The Communications and Digital Media Team is responsible for promoting and protecting the Council's overall interests in relation to the media. The relevant divisional Director is responsible for informing Members as relevant when a media statement is proposed. In order to ensure consistency and compliance with the Code of Recommended Practice on Local Authority Publicity, official statements to the media should only be made after consultation with the Communications and Digital Media Team.
- The team will be guided in Executive matters by the City Mayor or Deputy or Assistant City Mayor as relevant.

In relation to media activity for scrutiny matters including press releases, these will normally be arranged by the relevant Scrutiny Chairs in consultation with Vice Chairs acting through the Council's Communications and Digital Media Team. It is suggested that these may seek to:

- introduce the review and invite public comment;
- announce the agreement by Overview Select Committee of the finalised report;
- give details of formal Executive or key stakeholder comments.

Where possible, an opportunity will be given for the Executive Member and any relevant key stakeholder(s), as appropriate, to include a comment within any communications or press release.

### **ELECTION PERIODS**

**37**

- In Parliamentary elections, nothing should be published which mentions or includes a picture of any prospective candidate;
- During local elections, no Council newspaper, corporate or departmental should be published;
- Members and Officers should take particular care to keep Officers distant from party political matters.
- Members requesting information should make their "*need to know*" (as explained in provisions 9-11 in Parts A & B) clear and the "*need to know*" principle should be strictly observed.
- Prospective Parliamentary candidates (including current MPs) should be treated equally.
- Officers should avoid even the appearance of political bias.

Appropriate guidance will be given in relation to elections not covered within the list above.

Subject to this Convention, publicity is permitted of Members speaking on behalf of the Council about an approved policy.

External comments should be on strictly factual or professional matters. Care should be taken to avoid being misquoted or inadvertently associated with a particular candidate or political perspective.

Where the Council ought to be represented as stakeholder at an event with a potentially political dimension, officers should:

- Ensure that all contributions to any discussion are factual and based on approved Council policy.
- Avoid expressing opinions or views which may be perceived as containing a party political dimension.



- Avoid engaging in any media activity relating to the event (that is avoid TV or radio interviews, comment to the media, inclusion in photographs or TV filming).

**38** Town Hall Square other than Town Hall Square Concourse may (subject to prior booking) be used for political meetings.